Senior Leadership Day

By: Jamie Oliver

**Rationale**

Each school year begins with new faces, between teachers and students. Whether it is new faculty, transfer students, or just former Altoona students that don’t yet know everyone in their class. So Altoona High School decided to bring all of these people to a common meeting place and provide them with an environment that allows for individualism and team building. With a graduating class averaging right around 100 students, there is no reason these seniors should not know every person in their class.

We begin the day by bussing the students to Lake Altoona Park. This provides a fun atmosphere and gets us away from the school setting.

I have volunteered to organize the day’s activities. I will be in charge of getting bussing ready, a photographer, planning the team building activities, chaperones, assigning the student groups, lunch, and afternoon activities to allow the students to build on what they had learned in the morning sessions. I will train the senior class teachers and the senior leaders on what my expectations will be and what our ultimate goal is, so that they can pass this on to the rest of the class.

**Competencies Met**

The planning of senior leadership day began in August with a meeting between me, our high school principal and our junior/senior class guidance counselor. At this meeting we discussed the number of students that will be attending, the staff needed to run my stations, and some quick time frames of how the day will run. Once we had the groundwork set for the day’s events, we decided to communicate with email if we had concerns or questions.

* **Leadership 1 servant, moral, collaboration**
* **Leadership 2 organization vision**
* **Leadership 9 effective communication**

One of the first tasks we needed to complete was to organize the students that would be attending the leadership day. I began by getting a complete roster of the entire senior class. This includes all of the students who are eligible for graduation in May. I decided to break the students into groups of 10 students. I selected 10 students to be the group leaders. Upon meeting with the leaders, we selected the students that would be with each leader for the team building exercises. I utilized the leaders by having them break up boyfriend/girlfriends, cliques, ethnicity, and other acquaintances. This would provide the students an opportunity to get to know classmates that they had previously not known a lot about. One week prior to the event the leaders met with their groups to briefly discuss what the day would look like and what the expectations are for the students. It was also a quick glimpse of the “teammates” they would be working with on senior day.

* **School Community 3 culture, ethnicity attitudes**
* **School Community 5 interpersonal relationships**
* **Leadership 2 context for leadership**
* **Leadership 9 effective communication**

The next task was to organize the busses for all of the students and chaperones. Between the staff and the entire senior class, 3 busses were needed to get everyone to the park. I assigned the teams to specific busses so the student leaders would be allowed to check on the status of their team members before arriving at the park. I decided on an 8:00 pick up time from the high school, which allowed for all of the students to attend their first hour class for attendance purposes. The busses then dropped them off at the Lake Altoona Beach Park and would return for pick up at 2:00. So we required 3 bus drivers for an additional hour after their morning route and an hour before their afternoon route.

* **Decision Making 6 problem solving strategies**
* **Finance 9 budget options**

Upon arriving at the park we wanted a class picture of the entire senior class. The contour of the beach was a perfect place to line up all of the students and take a quick picture. Since this is a big day for all of the seniors that attend, I asked our yearbook advisor to attend the day’s activities and take the class picture, as well as pictures of the student through out the day. This was a perfect plan since many of the pictures would be used for the yearbook and the student’s graduation ceremony in May.

* **School Community 6 public relations**

The team building activities I selected were:

**Station 1 “The Rock”**

**The Challenge:** Discover three ways to get all of your team members to be balanced on the box for three seconds, without any body parts touching the ground. Brainstorm ideas and try them all.

**Life Applications:** Sometimes we need a stable person in our lives to help us remember what is important in. We need to let little things go and accept each others’ strengths and weaknesses.

* Describe a situation when you have been the “Rock” in someone’s life?
* What characteristics does the “Rock” possess?
* Share a situation in your life when you needed someone to be the “Rock” for you?

**Station 2 “Bridge Over the Raging River”**

**The Challenge:** Using the equipment provided move your team from the starting line to the finish line, without any body parts or the boards touching the ground. The tires and the ropes may touch the ground. If someone touches the ground the whole team must return to the starting line.

**Life Applications:** Identify characteristics that you saw in your team today that you have seen or experienced on another team in your life.

* Share examples of times in your life when you have encouraged someone to achieve a goal.
* When have you been a positive influence on someone who was struggling to make a decision?

**Station 3 “Whole World in Their Hands”**

**The Challenge:** As a team, you must transfer the large cage ball from on end of the cones to the other. The ball will start on a tire. The goal is to move the ball to a second tire at the other end of the cones. The group has to move the ball without letting it touch the ground and without touching it with their hands or arms.

**Life Applications**/**Discussion questions**

* What does the word “character” mean to you?
* What are the benefits of treating people with respect?
* What is forgiveness, and have you ever had to be foregiven?
* What motivates you to do well in school?
* Why do we need motivation?  Could we act without it?

**Station 4 “Juggler’s Carry”**

**The Challenge:** The team must transfer 4 large balls halfway across a given space. The group makes 4 trips, and on each trip the group adds one ball. On the first trip, the group transports one ball. On the second trip, the group adds another ball and transports two. This process continues until the team completes the fourth trip by transporting four balls.

* No ball may touch the ground between the starting line and ending line.
* Team members may not touch the balls with their hands.
* A different person or group of people must pick up a ball on each trip.
* When traveling, all team members must be connected to one another and must be touching a ball.
* If a team member breaks a rule, the team must start over from the line where it last completed the last successful trip.

**Life Applications:** Thinking about the world as a whole, how have you personally impacted the world in a positive way?

Soon you will be out of high school and many restrictions will be gone. You will be able to positively affect the world in many ways. What do you see as your role in the community or world?

**Station 5 “The Grand Canyon”**

**The Challenge:** To swing over the “Grand Canyon” and onto the boxes without touching the ground in between the boxes and starting line. If a team member touches the ground, a team member who successfully crossed the canyon and the person who touched the ground must start over.

**Life Applications:** Small deeds done are better than great deeds planned.

Pastor Peter Marshall

* We all have encountered large and sometimes impossible obstacles in our lives. What types of huge obstacles have stood in your way?
* As you prepare to leave high school, do you think the obstacles will change and if yes in what ways?

**Station 6 “The Toxic Transfer”**

This challenge is a daring task that requires group members to assume a good deal of risk. It also requires group members to be heavily involved in physically helping one another.

**The Challenge:** Group members must try to transfer the ball from one “tee” to the other while being assisted by the other group members. No one is allowed to touch the ball or tee, and the ropes must be held from the ends. The challenge is mastered when the ball is balanced on the opposite tee without any outside interference. If any rule is broken, the group must return to the start. **You may not use any additional equipment!**

**Life Applications:** Trust is a crucial component to any relationship and to the success of any team. Your trust has been tried with this task; did you trust all of your group members?

* What is another situation in your life that trust has been important?
* What is a situation in the future that you foresee as trust being a vital element?

**Station 7 “Flip the Tarp”**

**The Challenge:** Your entire team must stand on the tarp with the brown side facing up. Carefully, and without anyone touching the ground, you must flip the tarp completely over so that the green side will be up. If anyone touches the ground you must start over.

**Life Applications:** Often tasks appear much easier than they really are. We quickly resort to methods that we have used in the past. We are creatures of habit and we find it to be easier to do things the same all of the time. Can you think of a situation in which you struggled with a problem and someone had to show you the way?

* Share a situation in which you “showed someone the way” out of a problem.
* Have you ever had a friend who has made a horrible decision for themselves or dated someone you knew was not a good match for them?
* Were you able to be a true friend and let them know their decision wasn’t in their best interest?

**Station 8 “The Black Hole”**

This challenge may not be as physically and intellectually demanding, but the elements of trust and cooperation are essential to completing the task.

**The Challenge:** Group members begin on one side of the hula hoop and must remain on the tumbling mats during the challenge. Group members are to pass through the hoop to the other side. No person may touch the Black Hole (hula hoop). No one may dive through the Black Hole. Once you cross through the Black Hole you may not touch the ground on the beginning side of the Black Hole. If any rule is broken, the person making the mistake and one person who has passed through the hoop must start again.

**Life Applications:** One person can be a crucial ingredient on a team, but one person cannot make a team.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

You’ve encountered many tasks where you were unable to successfully complete them without the help of your friends or “team”. This will certainly continue as you leave high school and enter college or the work force. Knowing who you can count on and being a team player will determine your success or failure.

* How does achieving the Black Hole activity relate to coming together as a class?
* Identify times in your high school career when you have come together with a group.

**Station #9 “The Human Ladder”**

This challenge is a daring task that requires group members to assume a good deal of risk. It also requires group members to be heavily involved in physically helping one another. Your safety is important, so think through your ideas very carefully.

**The Challenge:** Group members must try to cross over the designated area while being assisted by the other group members. The challenge is mastered when the entire team has crossed over on the “ladder”. If any rule is broken team will return to the starting point.

**You may not use any additional equipment. No equipment or members should touch the trees/tables, etc in the area!**

**Life Applications:** Trust is a crucial component to any relationship and to the success of any team. Your trust has been tried with this task; did you trust all of your group members?

* What is another situation in your life that trust has been important?
* What is a situation in the future that you foresee as trust being a vital element?

**Station 10 “Team Transfer”**

**The Challenge:** As a team, transfer each team member from start to finish using only the big yellow physiology ball. The transferee must stay connected to the ball and off the ground to be successful.

Before you start think about who will be last and how that person will get across. If the transferee touches the ground they will need to start over, but not the whole team.

**Life Application:** Imagine you are driving down the road in you r car on a wild, stormy night, when you pass by a bus stop and three people are waiting for the bus:

1. An elderly lady who looks as if she is about to die.
2. An old friend who once saved your life.
3. The perfect partner you have been dreaming about.

Which one would you choose to offer a ride to, knowing that there could only be one passenger in your car?

**Discuss the question before continuing to read the passage.**

This is a moral/ethical dilemma that was once used as part of a job interview. You could pick up the elderly woman, because she is going to die, and thus you should save her first. Or you could pick the old friend because he once saved your life, and this would be the perfect chance to pay him back. However, you may never be able to find the perfect mate again.

The candidate who was hired (out of 200 applicants) had no trouble coming up with his answer. He simply stated: “I would give the car keys to my old friend and let him take the elderly woman to the hospital. I would stay behind and wait for the bus with the partner of my dreams.

* **Decision Making 1 processes and theories**
* **Leadership 6 integrity, ethics, fairness**
* **Leadership 7 safe, effective environment**
* **Leadership 9 effective communication**
* **School Community culture, ethnicity attitudes**
* **School Community 9 service learning**
* **School Law 6 teacher liability**

Since we were off campus we planned on providing lunch for all of the students and chaperones. After some careful consideration from various restaurants in the area we decided to have Fazoli’s Italian Restaurant to cater the event. This is a considerable cost when you consider that we would be feeding about 140 people. We attempted to secure some type of sponsorship for the event, but we were unable to find an organization to give us their financial support.

* **Leadership 3 context for leadership**
* **Leadership 9 effective communication**
* **Decision Making 6 problem solving strategies**

The final step in organizing the senior day activities was to provide some type of entertainment for the last two hours of the day. We decided that we would bring volleyballs, frisbees, and footballs for the students to use if they chose to get involved in a game at the parks fields and/or courts. We also knew that this would not appeal to many of the students, so we turned to a local music and entertainment company that is located in Altoona. Rock and Roll To Go is a company that can provide karaoke for a large get together. Since they are a local company and it was planned during their off peak hours of operation, we were able to get their services at a discounted price. So the students had music to listen and sing along with the karaoke if they so desired.

* **School Law 5 student discipline**
* **Human Resources 9 community support**

Expenses for the day;   
Substitute teachers $800.00

Rock and Roll to Go $50.00

Fazoli’s Catering $1000.00

Park Rental $150.00

Transportation $200.00

* **Finance 5 data and decision making**

**Supporting Research**

Our physical education department has two books written by Donald R. Glover and Daniel W. Midura called Team Building through Physical Activities. We use the activities in our classrooms each fall to get students to get out of their comfort zone and gain many of the benefits that go along with team building. For the senior day activities I chose ten challenges from the advanced sections of the books. Glover and Midura give educators concrete activities that promote teamwork and enhance the social skills of every student. Not only do they gain valuable skills, but they have fun doing it. Teams are required to organize a plan, interact with one another, and prepare how to accomplish the challenge.

Team-building activities are a way to provide high-impact learning, increase team skills and communications, and improve morale and productivity. I knew our students would reap the rewards by experiencing a sense of accomplishment in working as a group to complete a challenging task and learning ways to improve communication skills. Team building allowed the students to return to school reinvigorated and with a new set of problem-solving skills and a better understanding of the students in their class. In his article “What Are the Benefits of Team-Building?” Melvin Richardson listed the top six benefits of team building. He started with Common Goal, Trust/Agreement, Ideas/Participation, Motivation, Rapport, and Organizational Benefits. By selecting team building tasks that everyone could accomplish together I believe we were able to meet all of the student’s needs.

## Dan Collins writes that “the term "team building" has become a buzzword in recent years, and has many connotations”. In terms of student development, team-building exercises are important not for the immediate experience of the activities performed by the team, but also for the group skills, communication and bonding that result. The administrative team hopes that all of the members of the senior class will leave the park with these experiences. They may not use every skill each and every day of the school year, but we certainly hope they can have them in their decision making skills mind set.

Martin Hughes encourages your team to participate in team-building exercises; it can significantly improve your team's cohesiveness and your team members' level of enjoyment and satisfaction. “Being part of a team can be an empowering experience for many, but for some, it can be challenging--and sometimes even damaging--if your team's dynamics are skewed”. Team-building exercises help improve communication and motivation, and they can help create an environment in which each team mate can thrive. In today’s society face to face communication is not only at an all time low, but is almost nonexistent with some teenagers. They communicate via cell phones, I pads, or other forms of technology. So they don’t have to actually talk to another person and look them in the eye. The team building activities force them to see the fear, excitement, and confidence in their teammate’s eyes as they work toward the common goal.

According to a 2003 study published by McGill University researchers in "Avante," team-building interventions have a positive effect on team members' perceptions of social cohesion. If your team environment is not cohesive and your team members' goals are disparate, it's likely that your team's overall productivity will suffer. To boost your team's cohesiveness and productivity, consider performing team-building exercises that promote a unified goal and recognize and celebrate each team member's unique contribution to the group's success. A more cohesive and productive team environment will be more enjoyable and improve your team members' quality of life and, possibly, your team's performance. You can read more at: <http://www.livestrong.com/article/123012-benefits-team-building-exercises/#ixzz2QUYGfEdF>

**So What?**

The day went very smooth, with no major obstacles; it started a little cold but ended with a bright sunny afternoon. The students made some lasting memories and relationships that will be remembered well beyond their high school years. We had parents and school board members present to watch the festivities, as well as a staff member that took photographs throughout the day. Everyone that sees the excitement and the fun the kids are having will have a better understanding of why we do this for our students.

My main concern for senior day is funding in the future. School budgets are getting cut and programs are being eliminated, so it may come to a point where will need to modify the how we will run the day’s events or find sponsorship/donations to compensate for all of the expenses.

I felt very lucky that I had the opportunity to work with such a great staff and senior class. Organizing this experience was a lot of work but it matched so many of the administration competencies. It also gave me invaluable experience of leadership and decision making, and will help me to become a more effective administrator.